

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A towing system for towing a water sports apparatus over a body of water behind a towing vessel, comprising:

a lift apparatus;

5 a bridle line adapted to couple the lift apparatus to an attachment point on the towing vessel, where the lift apparatus is adapted to fly above and behind the towing vessel during forward motion of the towing vessel over the body of water; and

a rider towline for towing a rider of the water sports apparatus, the rider towline having a distal end adapted to be held by the rider, and where the towing system is
10 adapted so that, during flight of the lift apparatus, a portion of the rider towline is supported at an intermediate location along the bridle line between the lift apparatus and the attachment point.

2. The towing system of claim 1, where the rider towline is selectively
15 supportable at one of a plurality of different intermediate locations along the bridle line between the lift apparatus and the attachment point.

3. The towing system of claim 2, where the towing system is configured so that changing from one of the intermediate locations to another varies an angle of the
20 rider towline that occurs during towing of the water sports apparatus.

4. The towing system of claim 2, where the rider towline includes a proximal end adapted to be secured to the towing vessel, and where during towing of the water sports apparatus, the rider towline extends from the towing vessel substantially along the bridle line to a securing device at a selected one of the plurality of different intermediate locations, and then beyond the securing device the rider towline is free to diverge away from the bridle line.

5. The towing system of claim 4, where the securing device includes a pulley adapted to receive the rider towline therethrough.

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6. The towing system of claim 1, where the lift apparatus includes a float adapted to maintain the lift apparatus afloat on the body of water while not in flight.

7. The towing system of claim 1, where the lift apparatus includes a base adapted to enable the lift apparatus to plane over the body of water while not in flight.

8. The towing system of claim 7, where the base includes plural elongate floats, each having a downwardly extending fin.

9. The towing system of claim 1, where lift characteristics of the lift apparatus and placement of the intermediate location along the bridle line are selected based on rider body weight and desired level of lift enhancement, so as to provide a vertical upwardly directed force sufficient to unweight the rider without overcoming gravity.

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10. A towing system for towing a water sports apparatus over a body of water behind a towing vessel, comprising:

a rider towline configured to couple a rider of the water sports apparatus to the towing vessel, the rider towline including a distal end adapted to be gripped by the rider
10 to enable the rider to be pulled over the body of water on the water sports apparatus during forward motion of the towing vessel; and

a lift system coupled with the rider towline and adapted to lift the rider towline during forward motion of the towing vessel so that an uppermost point of the rider towline is above and behind the towing vessel.

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11. The towing system of claim 10, where the lift system includes a lift apparatus secured via a bridle line to an attachment point on the towing vessel, the lift apparatus being adapted to fly above and behind the towing vessel during forward motion of the towing vessel, and where the uppermost point of the rider towline is supported at
20 an intermediate location along the bridle line between the lift apparatus and the attachment point.

12. The towing system of claim 11, where the rider towline is selectively supportable at one of a plurality of different intermediate locations along the bridle line between the lift apparatus and the attachment point.

5 13. The towing system of claim 12, where the towing system is configured so that changing from one of the intermediate locations to another varies an angle of the rider towline that occurs during towing of the water sports apparatus.

10 14. The towing system of claim 12, where the rider towline includes a proximal end adapted to be secured to the towing vessel, and where during towing of the water sports apparatus, the rider towline extends from the towing vessel substantially along the bridle line to a securing device at a selected one of the plurality of different intermediate locations, and then beyond the securing device the rider towline is free to diverge away from the bridle line.

15 15. The towing system of claim 11, where the lift apparatus includes a float adapted to maintain the lift apparatus afloat on the body of water while not in flight.

20 16. The towing system of claim 11, where the lift apparatus includes a base adapted to enable the lift apparatus to plane over the body of water while not in flight.

17. The towing system of claim 16, where the base includes plural elongate float runners, each having a downwardly extending fin.

18. A towing system for towing a water sports apparatus over a body of water
5 behind a towing vessel, comprising:

a lift apparatus;

a bridle line having a distal end adapted to be connected to the lift apparatus and a proximal end adapted to be secured to the towing vessel;

a rider towline having a distal end with a handle adapted to be gripped by a rider
10 of the water sports apparatus and a proximal end adapted to be secured to the towing vessel; and

a securing device positioned at an intermediate location along the bridle line and adapted to engage the bridle line and rider towline so that, when the proximal end of the bridle line and the proximal end of the rider towline are secured to the towing vessel, a
15 portion of the rider towline between the handle and the proximal end is drawn upward upon rising of the lift apparatus.

19. A method of towing a water sports apparatus and rider across a body of water, comprising:

providing a towing vessel;

attaching a lift apparatus to the towing vessel with a bridle line;

5 providing a rider towline with a handle to be gripped by the rider;

engaging the rider towline with the bridle line; and

accelerating the towing vessel to a desired towing speed while the handle of the rider towline is held by the rider, thereby causing the lift apparatus to fly above and behind the towing vessel, where engaging the rider towline with the bridle line is performed so that, when the handle of the rider towline is gripped by the rider, the rider towline extends upward from the handle toward the bridle line and is supported at an intermediate location along the bridle line, the intermediate location being between the lift apparatus and the towing vessel.

15 20. The method of claim 19, where the lift apparatus includes a float adapted to maintain the lift apparatus afloat on the body of water while not in flight.

21. The method of claim 19, where the lift apparatus includes a base adapted to enable the lift apparatus to plane over the body of water while not in flight.

22. The method of claim 21, where the base includes plural elongate float runners, each having a downwardly extending fin.

23. The method of claim 19, where the intermediate location is one of a plurality of different intermediate locations along the bridle line, and where the method includes selecting a desired one of a plurality of different intermediate locations, and where engaging the rider towline with the bridle line is performed so that the bridle line is supported at the desired one of the plurality of different intermediate locations.

24. The method of claim 23, where selecting a desired one of a plurality of different intermediate locations is performed based on a desired relative angle of the rider towline during towing of the water sports apparatus.